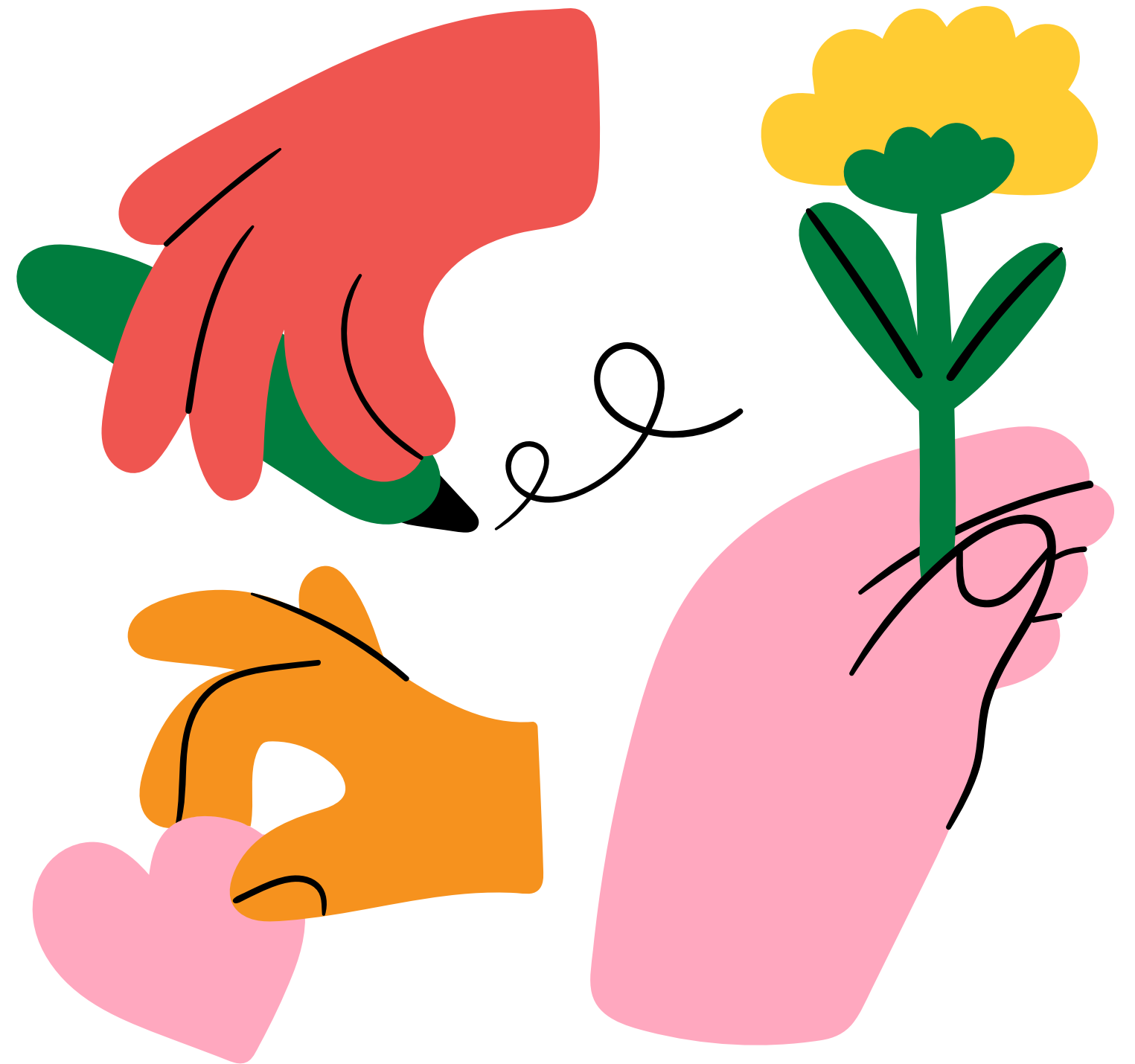


A story of participation

Co-produced neighbourhood development
with Thamesmead residents

April 2025



THAMESMEAD TM

 Peabody

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

 CLEVER
Cities

 The Young
Foundation

Acknowledgements

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The Young Foundation Learning and social impact partner
The Young Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation driving community research and social innovation. We bring communities, organisations and policymakers together to understand the issues people care about and support collective action to improve lives. We involve communities in research and innovate together to inspire positive change. We deliver distinctive initiatives and programmes to shape a fairer future.

This report draws on in-depth stakeholder interviews, as well as evaluation and research undertaken as part of the delivery of the South Thamesmead Garden Estate. Recognising their time and feedback in the development of this report, the authors would like to thank:

Project leads:
Kate Batchelor
Nicola Murphy-Evans

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Joseph Griffiths

The South Thamesmead Garden Estate (STGE)
A large-scale programme to make open spaces around South Thamesmead more welcome, accessible and useful for the local community. The project was supported by:

The Greater London Authority (GLA) Lead partner
The Greater London Authority, through the office of the Mayor of London, is responsible for developing London’s regional spatial plan, the London Plan. The GLA is also responsible for delivering a range of city-wide strategies including the London Environment Strategy which sets out an ambitious vision for improving London’s environment for the benefit of all Londoners.

Peabody Lead partner
Peabody is leading the regeneration of Thamesmead, with a mission to improve, grow and look after the town for the long-term. Peabody is taking a ‘whole place’ approach to the regeneration of the town. This means investing in the buildings and landscape they own and manage. It also means working with local people and partners to create new opportunities and shape great places.

Community Design Collective Lead community group
A group of dedicated local people who were recruited, trained and paid to share their local knowledge, any professional expertise, lived experiences and priorities to shape the shared public spaces. Some of the members include Nina Mehmi, Dorrell Gayle-Menzie, Vanita Pitla and Chris Sekulla.

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Building partnerships to support local communities and businesses.

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Designing public spaces to deliver outcomes for nature and communities.

Maylim Landscape Contractors
Creating spaces for nature and communities to thrive.

Daisy Froud Mayor’s Design Advocate
Providing expert advice that allowed a diverse range of voices to shape decision making in STGE.

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The work in Thamesmead was part of the [EU Horizon 2020 CLEVER Cities](#) research and innovation programme, driving collaborative, nature-based solutions addressing the climate crisis, increasing biodiversity, and tackling social and economic inequalities.

EU Horizon 2020 provided part-funding for the programme, including additional resource for research, learning and experimentation in Thamesmead, and for sharing learnings with those undertaking similar work.

Photography by Richard Heald and muf architecture/art



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Foreword

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MAYOR OF LONDON

As London grows and evolves, we must make sure it becomes a greener, fairer, and a more inclusive city that prioritises the health and wellbeing of all Londoners. Our communities are on the frontline of the climate and ecological crises, and we know the impacts won't be felt equally. But by putting nature and green infrastructure at the heart of development, we can help to build happier, healthier, and more resilient neighbourhoods.

The CLEVER Cities programme and the work of the GLA, supported South Thamesmead Garden Estate project, have shown how things can be done differently. By putting communities at the heart of decision-making, we can create nature-rich places that truly reflect the needs and aspirations of the people who live there.

This report is for everyone involved in shaping the future of London. It sets out how to take a much more inclusive and people-focused approach to regeneration. It sets out key principles for co-designing places with, not just for, local people. It also highlights real-life examples from Thamesmead – that show what's possible when we co-design spaces together.

I hope that this report and the work of Thamesmead's Community Design Collective inspire action – to rethink how we shape our city, give Londoners a greater say in their neighbourhoods, and bring nature into the heart of our communities, creating a greener, healthier and more inclusive London for everyone.

Mete Coban
Deputy Mayor, Environment and Energy



Thamesmead has an extraordinary landscape. The 240 hectares of green and blue space we own and manage offer huge potential to improve health and wellbeing, increase biodiversity and respond to the climate crisis.

Enhancing and maintaining these natural assets is a key part of Peabody's mission to improve, grow and look after the town for the long-term. Working with local communities and partners, we're now creating inclusive, purposeful sustainable spaces across the town to benefit people and planet. Engaging the community in these projects and programmes is critical to their success.

Our work on the South Thamesmead Garden Estate has seen us, with support from the GLA, deepen community collaboration. Notably, it has seen us transfer power to a group of dedicated residents – the Community Design Collective – who have challenged assumptions we might make about their communities, and shaped key decisions about their local environment. Working together, we have revitalised a public space for everyone to enjoy.

Our work with the Community Design Collective has taken us into new territory. It has brought inevitable challenges but also considerable benefits. In sharing the lessons we learned in Thamesmead, we hope that place-makers across the UK will embed greater participation and collaboration in their work.

Dr Phil Askew
Director of Landscape, Peabody

Executive summary



This report is aimed at developers and wider built environment professionals, exploring how successful co-production programmes can be commissioned working with residents and local people to regenerate and revive places and spaces. Sharing lessons from the South Thamesmead Garden Estate (STGE), the report considers how all those involved can fully participate and collaborate.

The appetite and case for co-production

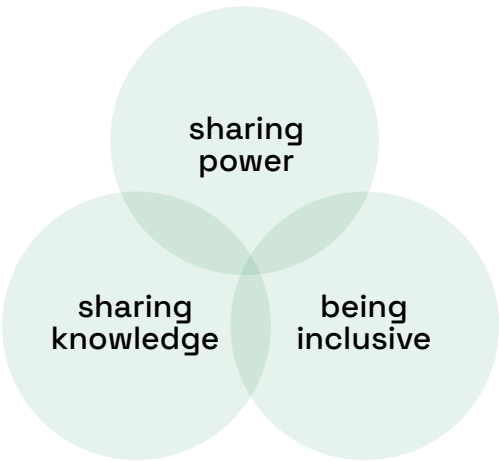
London aspires to be a leading green global city, and regenerating the built environment will be key to meeting this goal. Across the built environment sector, and in the capital’s communities, there is significant interest in building participation to shape urban areas, creating greener, healthier, wilder and more inclusive places.

Co-production brings people who are most affected by the outcome together with other stakeholders to create meaningful solutions. It means creating places *with* – not just *for* – people who will be most impacted by change. This has considerable benefits for all parties involved in placemaking and regeneration. It can have a real impact on how developments are shaped, increasing local buy-in for them, as well as having knock-on benefits for community health and wellbeing, cohesion and resilience.

A frequently asked question is ‘are communities ready and able to participate in co-producing such projects?’ This report asks, ‘are commissioners and practitioners ready?’



‘Co-production’ is not about the successful delivery of a set process, but a commitment to three key principles that underpin every co-production process:



Working with three key principles, trust is both a starting point for and an outcome of co-production: it will help to get these things right and getting these things right will generate trust (Future of London, Making the Case for Co-Production). Commissioners must ensure that shifting power and decision-making to local communities, and engaging them as equal partners in change, are at the core of a co-produced approach.



Defining co-production

The language used to describe community participation is varied, and no universal term meets everybody’s needs. This report references ‘co-production’ throughout.

In regeneration, co-production in its truest form embeds principles of collaborative working with communities all the way through the development of places and spaces.

This includes at:

- Strategic definition:** building in mechanisms for residents to collectively shape the vision and scope of their role in regeneration (RIBA Stage 0)
- Briefing and design:** collaborative design, through iterative cycles of exchange, based on testing and feedback (RIBA Stages 1-4)
- Delivery:** participation in making and constructing a project (RIBA Stage 5)
- Handover and use:** working collaboratively to define success and evaluate the impact of a project (RIBA Stages 6 and 7)

Co-production in this context means working with South Thamesmead Garden Estate (STGE) residents and creating spaces with them, incorporating their voices and values in decision-making with clients, design teams, construction teams and asset managers

From principles to practice

That question – **how can commissioners and developers ensure they are ready for participation with local communities?** – is at the core of this report, which is based on learnings from the practical delivery of the STGE programme.

The regeneration of the STGE was an ambitious programme that moved away from traditional practices of consulting and informing, towards community collaboration and empowerment. This led to the creation of outstanding sustainable shared spaces, where people and the environment thrive.

The programme is part of Peabody’s holistic regeneration of Thamesmead. This involves realising the potential of Thamesmead’s natural landscape so people and nature can thrive. The CLEVER Cities funding has supported the local community in South Thamesmead to contribute to this work through the co-creation of nature-based solutions to address climate change and biodiversity loss alongside health and other social inequalities.

CLEVER Cities trialled working with residents to co-produce the regeneration of urban areas, sharing decision-making and incorporating their aspirations and experiences. Residents were engaged not ‘in consultation’ but as partners. London was chosen as one of three lead cities as part of CLEVER, along with Hamburg and Milan.

You can learn more about the CLEVER Cities programme [here](#).

[Find out more >](#)

This report and its findings

In 2022, partners supporting the London programme helped to create a guidance note and principles for those interested in Commissioning Co-Design, in which they were ‘encouraged to experiment and look for ways to normalise these ways of working, and to reflect on their own organisations’ power dynamics and processes’.

Building on that guidance, this report, authored by The Young Foundation, shares practical reflections from project partners, and a dedicated group of ten residents – the Community Design Collective – all of whom have been involved in the design and creation of shared spaces in the STGE.

The report explores how the principles of co-production translate into practice. It does not claim to have all the answers, but shares direct lessons learnt and recommendations from commissioners, to support those who are interested in co-produced regeneration of the built environment across London.

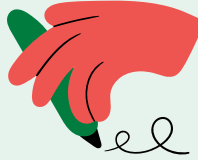
While some aspects of learning are unique to Thamesmead’s ecological, cultural and historical context, many insights are relevant to developers and built environment professionals undertaking co-produced regeneration programmes in any built environment sector.

This report reflects on the experience of co-production in Thamesmead through four themes:

1. The conditions for co-production
2. Ways of working
3. Residents’ experiences
4. Sustaining the legacy

Each chapter will explore why its theme is important in co-production, how it played out in Thamesmead, and what to do next.

Key recommendations include:



Develop a roadmap when deciding the conditions for co-production but allow it to evolve with community involvement.

Build resident involvement as standard into early conversations at RIBA Stage 0 and be prepared to widen the scope of co-production as trust is built and as resources allow.



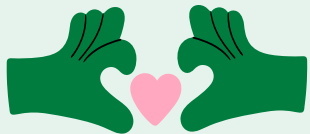
The processes followed throughout a co-produced project are just as critical to creating impact as the final output you want to achieve on the ground.

Be prepared to adapt your ways of working in different phases of the programme to ensure community members are truly heard on key decisions and fully understand the power of their role.



Co-production encourages innovative ways of working. Embrace this and build in opportunities to review and evolve practices and policies at project milestones.

Build in time to acknowledge internally where co-produced projects might depart from ‘business as usual’ and welcome the opportunity to work with residents in a relational way.

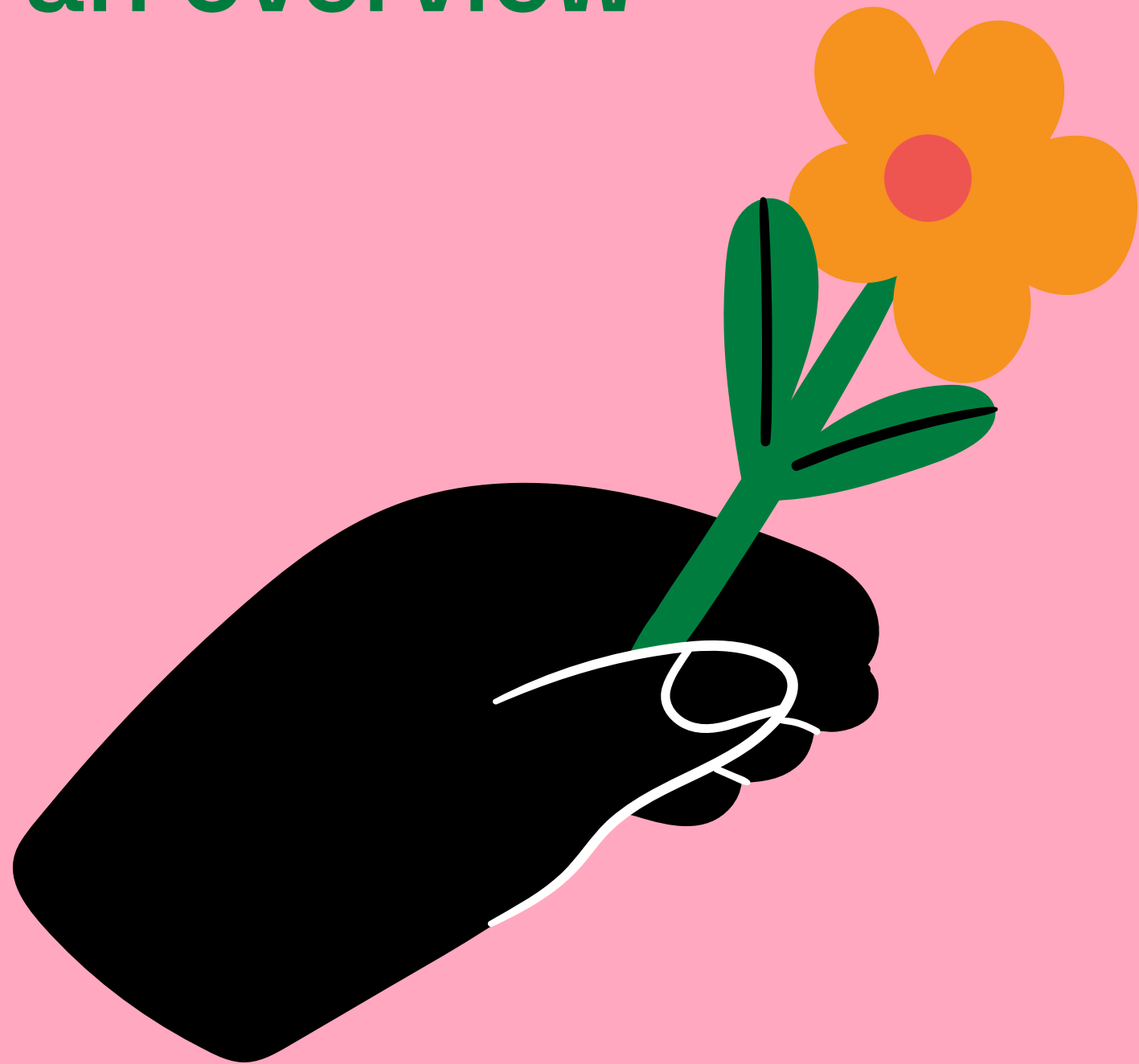


See co-production as a long-term investment in your local place and community capacity, and act accordingly.

Maximise the impact, legacy and sustainability of your project, by involving residents in decisions on social value and not just seeing the value of co-production as the design of a set space.

The report concludes with opportunities for policymakers and funders to create the conditions for co-production in future regeneration projects.

South Thamesmead Garden Estate: an overview



Thamesmead is a town in south-east London, straddling the London Borough of Bexley and Royal Borough of Greenwich.

Peabody is leading the regeneration of the town, with a mission to grow, improve and look after Thamesmead for the long term.



As owners of 65% of the land in Thamesmead, Peabody is responsible for some 240 hectares of parks and green space, 7km of canals, five lakes, 5km of river frontage and 53,000 trees.

Improving and maintaining Thamesmead's green and blue spaces is a key part of Peabody's work. A comprehensive green infrastructure strategy, *Living in the Landscape*, underpins the many nature-based plans, projects and programmes running across the town.

South Thamesmead Garden Estate

The South Thamesmead Garden Estate is one such programme, focusing on reinvigorating a range of open spaces in Thamesmead to benefit the community. Contributing to a European funded project called CLEVER Cities, the South Thamesmead Garden Estate programme focuses on trying new ways to work with the community to create sustainable neighbourhoods that help people and nature to thrive.

The London team was made up of representatives from Peabody, the Greater London Authority and Groundwork, supported by a range of other expert partners ([see Acknowledgements](#)).

The programme was carried out in two phases:



The first phase of the regeneration programme was completed in 2021.

It delivered high-quality hard and soft landscaping, lighting and play equipment and seating across two large housing estates. Residents were consulted on the changes, but this phase did not involve co-production.



The second phase began in 2023 and will be completed in 2025.

It sees the wholesale change of more than three hectares of land through a programme co-produced with the community. This includes the creation of biodiverse open spaces, with refurbished pathways, new seating, hard and soft landscaping, new trees, social and cooking areas, an outdoor classroom, rain gardens, new and upgraded play areas, and new lighting.



Involving residents and pushing the boundaries of co-production

The key mechanism put in place to support co-production in the local area was the **Community Design Collective (CDC)**, a group of dedicated local people who were recruited, trained and paid to share their local knowledge, any professional expertise, lived experiences and priorities to shape the shared public spaces.

The CDC engaged in over 2,000 hours of design conversations, and as the programme progressed, the role of the CDC extended beyond co-design to delivery and use, moving towards equal partnership in creating change in Thamesmead.

Other methods of community engagement in Thamesmead included:

Community researchers: a group of residents who supported insight and evaluation throughout the lifetime of the programme.

Thamesmead Nature Forum: an open forum for residents passionate about nature and Thamesmead's green and blue spaces.

Making Space for Nature Community Fund: offering grants of up to £3,000 to bring local people's nature-based projects to life.

Outcomes

Like many co-produced programmes in the built environment, this programme presented both opportunities and challenges, innovating new ways of engaging and collaborating with communities that move away from mainstream approaches to decision making. While the co-production approach is more resource intensive, those involved say the rewards are significant.

'I think there were some really great successes, some missed opportunities, and definitely some learning. But overall, we are leaving a community in a much better place and in a much stronger position to affect change in their own community'.

Groundwork Employee

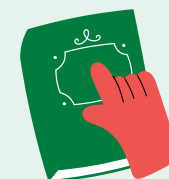
Local residents have benefited from opportunities to learn new skills, build relationships, and create sustainable spaces, while delivery partners have strengthened their skills, deepened their understanding of community engagement and created the conditions for long-term change.

'I think it's input from various people about making it more friendly and open [...] Abbey Way has always been just a walk through. No one stops there. But now, there's chairs, benches, somewhere to hang around, and people enjoy it [...] I think it has been a space that the CDC has been a great influence on, on changing the space itself, and the use of the space'.

CDC Member



The role residents played in co-producing the South Thamesmead Garden Estate will maximise the community's use and enjoyment of shared spaces for years to come. The following sections of this report explore four themes of co-production with examples from the STGE programme and recommendations for action.



Further resources

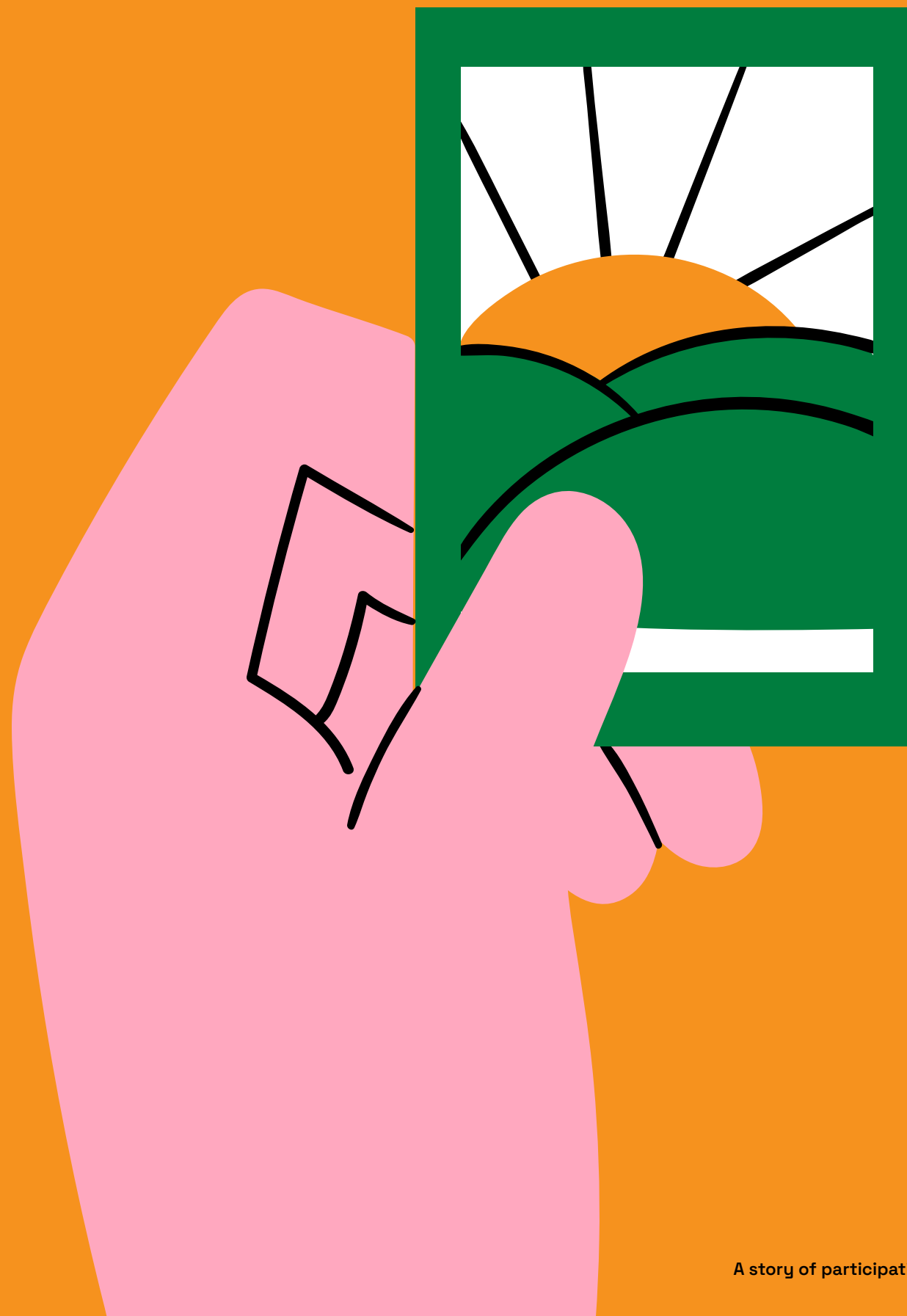
Read more about the story of regenerating Thamesmead's natural and built environment in [Together in Thamesmead](#) and [Looking after Thamesmead](#).

1

The conditions for co-production

Co-production can be transformative for people, places, practice and systems. It requires a commitment to share power through shared decision-making, where assumptions might be challenged, and unexpected outcomes may emerge as residents re-imagine the future of their local community. In a co-produced programme, residents are empowered to make decisions, not just suggestions. Creating the conditions for this way of working requires time, training and development, transparency and trust.

Before starting a co-produced journey, a decision must be taken: can the right conditions for co-production be created, or is there a different method of community participation that better suits the context, ambitions, and resources of the project?



What happened in Thamesmead

Built into the DNA of the STGE programme was the opportunity to take a different approach from previous local landscape projects and work more deeply with residents. This was in part due to key Peabody staff championing co-production, partner support and the catalyst afforded through participating in CLEVER Cities with its focus on ensuring resident involvement.

At the start, the programme team sought external expertise in the form of a Mayor of London Design Advocate – Daisy Froud – who was engaged as a ‘critical friend’ for the project, supporting the collaborative definition of the CDC’s role and establishing ways of working. This was vital in ensuring all those involved were ‘on the same page’, given different prior experiences and expertise in community engagement and co-production.

Having taken this time at the start of the project to build trust and understanding, the CDC and project team found that the possibilities of co-production expanded over time. Establishing governance mechanisms to support co-production takes time, as we will explore in chapter two. In the STGE, it had not been possible to put these mechanisms in place to engage the CDC in the initial stages of project planning (RIBA Stage 0, Strategic Definition). This was a missed opportunity. But, once formed, the role of the CDC expanded beyond the briefing, as a greater understanding of the ambitions (and feasibility of meeting these ambitions) was realised, in the project team, senior stakeholders, and residents themselves.

The group’s role was extended to cover later stages of the programme and as co-client in the manufacturing and construction phase (RIBA Stage 5). This was a unique opportunity. A member of the CDC recalls the appetite of the group to sit in on the procurement process, a suggestion welcomed with enthusiasm from those supporting the programme:

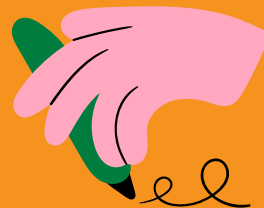
‘We came to the end of the technical design stage and were going out to tender for the contractor to deliver the public works. I said, “Can I sit in on the procurement process?” and they [programme partners] said “Actually, you all can, we can train you up so that you can be part of this”. I feel like that’s huge’.
CDC Member

Similarly, community researchers were initially only meant to be involved in baseline research but went on to have an ongoing and influential role, including leading aspects of the evaluation.

This experience shows how the conditions for co-production can – and should be allowed to – evolve. A CDC member noted the value of ‘a process that encourages a conversation to be had’; a framework to redefine how you think about engagement, as opposed to a tool for achieving your desired impact.



Recommendations



Develop a roadmap when deciding the conditions for co-production but allow it to evolve with community involvement.

Involving external expertise such as a critical friend can be seen as a ‘nice to have’ expense but can be invaluable and save time and resource in the long term.

Engaging them in discrete tasks – e.g. co-production definition – can keep costs lower while maximising value and input.

Take the time internally to define initial conditions for co-production, supported by a critical friend if possible, answering why you want to co-produce and what is in scope.

Supporting questions should include:

- Who do you want or need to work with?
- What might their role include and what activities might they do?
- Where will you seek input from the wider community?
- When can people involved expect to see change on the ground?
- How will decision-making, responsibility and accountability be distributed?
- What therefore is the right approach and method to work with the community?

Bring residents into early conversations (such as RIBA Stage 0, before budgets are set on a project).

This will allow for their aspirations, priorities, and capacity to shape their level of involvement in the project.

Schedule time to review your definition and conditions of co-production aligned with milestones and budget decisions (such as RIBA stages).

Be prepared to widen the scope of co-production, involving residents in decision-making and taking time to support them through changes.



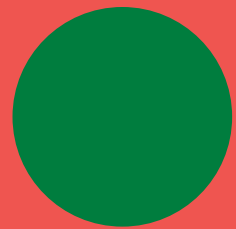
Further resources

[Engagement Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work](#)

[Making the case for co-production](#)

[Towards Spatial Justice: A Co-Design Guide](#)

[What is Co-Design? and accompanying resource But is it Co-Design?](#)



Revisiting organisational ways of working

Co-production creates space for the voices of residents to make decisions, informed by their lived experience. This often requires a change in organisational culture and processes, embedding inclusion in structures of governance and providing policies to support this. Commissioners may need to build community participation into established ways of working and overcome (perceived and actual) barriers to sharing power with local residents.

Often, this comes down to how we understand and approach navigating risk. A co-produced approach encourages such perceived barriers to be duly considered, and reframed as possibility and potential rather than outright risk; an opportunity to work openly with communities to discover new ways of thinking and doing.



What happened in Thamesmead

Co-produced ways of working often gain momentum when staff see the value of the change to internal work processes. Regeneration has traditionally been viewed as an opportunity to focus engagement on expertise in sustainability, including buildings and landscape. The experience of co-producing spaces in the STGE challenged this assumption, with staff at Peabody reflecting ‘it’s easy for us to look at an area and think we know what needs to be done there. But we’re not necessarily going to be the users of that space’ (Peabody Employee).

Taking a co-produced approach has also encouraged Peabody to redefine their roles working alongside community partners, working and thinking differently about organisational processes. Critically, this often involved the project team working closely with members of staff who were not involved in the day-to-day of the programme – such as colleagues in legal and procurement – bringing them too on the journey of co-production. For example:

Paying residents for their time and expertise

The CDC participants were paid the London Living Wage to share their expertise and insights, innovating solutions through sustained conversation. This required Peabody to design new payment processes.

Sharing detailed project information with residents

This included working closely with colleagues in legal, and senior stakeholders to revisit assumptions on what contractual information could be shared with residents. The project team also found ways to communicate the costs of the programme. Contract budgets can feel excessive when compared to household expenses (e.g. trees and plants). Architects and quantity surveyors designed a workshop for the CDC to show how designers and quantity surveyors work together to manage costs, using a practical example of designing a bus stop.

New ways of working with suppliers aligned with your principles

This included exploring their values in terms of social responsibility, and what structures they have in place to support this, including processes to ensure co-production is undertaken ethically. When working with multiple suppliers, the ‘culture’ the programme is creating, and roles and responsibilities between the project team and suppliers, must be defined and revisited.

The journey of co-production highlighted the potential of this approach to build community capacity for involvement in local decision-making by engaging with residents, listening to them, and supporting their involvement from concept to construction in a way that mutually benefits Peabody and encourages broader internal capacity for innovation. By ‘working with people, engaging with them, listening to them, taking them on a journey’ a member of Peabody’s Senior Leadership Team said this process encouraged them to create nature-based solutions that allow residents to live in the landscape, challenging thinking about how spaces will be used and maintained after construction is completed:

‘I think that’s very different to how things were done when I was a landscape architect’
Peabody Employee



Recommendations



Co-production encourages innovative ways of working. Embrace this and build in opportunities to review and evolve practices and policies at project milestones.

Embrace the opportunity to work across teams to respond and redefine what is accessible, transparent and meaningful for communities.

This is about a capacity to work in a ‘relational way’, working with local communities and challenging an institution’s role in existing power dynamics. It means establishing structures and processes that build trust.

From the outset, consider where your project might depart from ‘business as usual’ (e.g., in sign off processes, communications, payments, etc.), and build in time to engage and work with internal stakeholders.

Involve these colleagues in reflection on the project’s journey and successes so they see the value created because of change, and so you can gather feedback on how to best engage colleagues and adapt processes in the future.

Use tangible examples and detail to include design project costs.

There may be opportunities to work with facilitators, supporting clients to truly engage with the community on this, including covering topics such as value engineering (where materials or methods are evaluated and might be substituted for less expensive alternatives, without unreasonable loss of functionality).



Further resources

[A Greener Thamesmead](#)
[Commissioning Co-Design](#)
[Co-Production: It’s about Power and Trust](#)
[Rebuilding Trust](#)

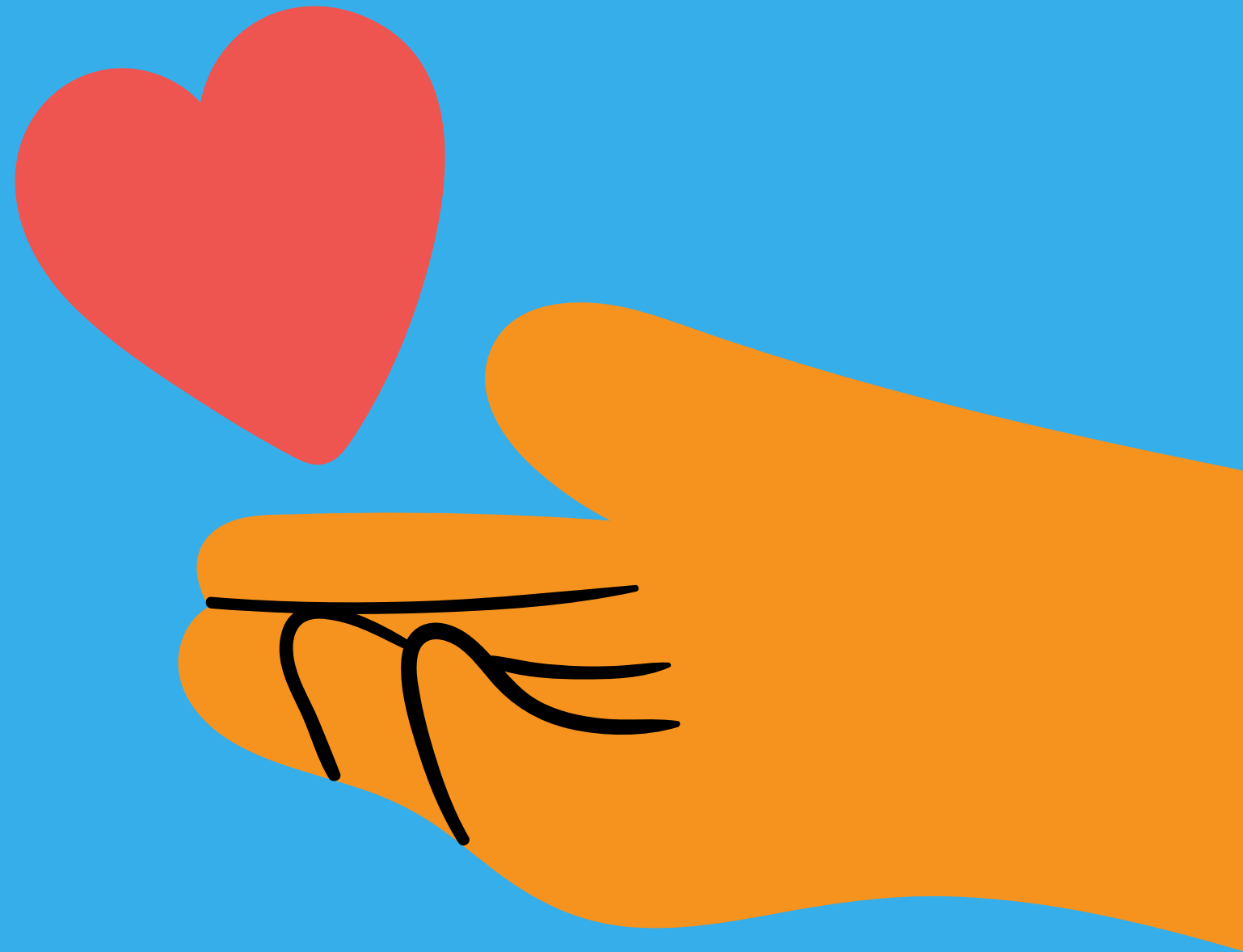


Residents' experiences

The key purpose of co-producing regeneration projects is to improve the experience for residents, allowing their lived experiences to shape design outcomes that they will live, work and play in for years to come.

The first step is bringing a diverse set of voices and experiences into the process. This means exploring whose voice is less heard in the community, why, and how can they be more involved. Regeneration projects have not traditionally held space for residents to play as active a role, and it is important to acknowledge this. For some, regeneration of the built environment might be very welcome, while others may feel suspicious or concerned about a risk of gentrification. Co-production and community engagement can be difficult for different people at different times and in different ways.

Time for residents to feel heard and share the impact of their experiences must be built into the programme, and resources to support local people on this journey should be established, noting that this will, again, mean different things to different people.





What happened in Thamesmead

Various forms of resident engagement were used during the STGE programme (see page 9), to provide different routes for residents to be part of the process. Overall, there was a gradual shift to deeper forms of engagement such as the Community Design Collective. This was partly for practical reasons, such as responding to what could be done on the ground with residents during Covid-19 restrictions, as well as the opportunity for co-production afforded by such methods.

The CDC were recruited as partners in change: residents with a deep commitment to helping realise the potential of their area, through long-term, formal engagement. Thirteen residents in total were recruited, each bringing different insights into the programme that challenged the project team's thinking and ways of working, adding value and accountability to the design and construction phases with their insights. With the CDC's involvement at RIBA Stage 5, they were able to act as 'custodian[s] of narratives, individuals that would convey the essence of the story behind the design decisions moving forward to further enforce it at every stage' (CDC Member).

Working with the CDC was a new process for the project team, and this required working iteratively and adaptively to ensure that the group were able to fully engage in decision-making, particularly when this involved engaging with contractors. Sometimes these iterations emerged when the CDC members were unable to be involved in decision-making, for example over changes to longstanding features of the local environment (such as "The Lump", a locally-named feature of the landscape that residents had a longstanding relationship with) or when quick decisions were required during construction when aspects of the design needed to be adapted (including for value engineering). The importance of being as open and transparent as possible with the CDC about decision-making timelines and feasibility emerged as key to the relationship and trust between the project team and the group.

As well as providing design training and support to engage with a RIBA-aligned programme, providing time and support for the CDC to reflect individually and collectively on their role was important. Individuals fed back that the group's innovative approach to decision-making and governance, and the power they held in their roles, only truly struck home when presenting at a final conference as part of the CLEVER Cities programme.

Recommendations



The processes followed throughout a co-produced project are just as critical to creating impact as the final output you want to achieve.

Set ambitious social impact goals that recognise the motivations, capabilities and ambitions of residents.

These should be co-produced with residents and built into the project programme from day one (and any resulting briefs), establishing simple ways to track and reflect on outcomes throughout:

At the start of the project, understand the motivations, capabilities and ambitions of those involved, identifying opportunities for support and development.

Throughout the project, hear the experiences of those involved. Learn if they feel empowered to get involved, how well they understand their role in decision-making, and the impact this has on trust and their sense of belonging.

After the co-production process (immediate and longer term), understand how existing residents feel about and use the regenerated spaces, and hear whether communities and organisations think the programme has led to new ways of working and power-sharing.

Be prepared to adapt your ways of working in different phases of the programme to ensure community members are truly heard on key decisions.

For example, creating processes for making tight-turnaround decisions on site during RIBA Stage 5 (such as contacting community members for input by WhatsApp with a 24-hour response window), and agreeing

with the community how to move ahead and reach consensus when not all members are available for decisions.

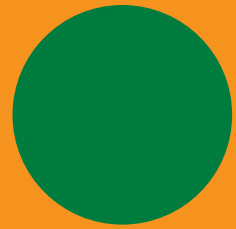
Learning and facilitation support from an external party can go a long way to support a resident group as they explore and understand their role.

Don't wait until the end of the programme to share the value of engaging residents as partners in change with the local community: build in opportunities when other project activities are taking place, such as at the end of each milestone or RIBA work stage.



Further resources

Hear directly from the Community Design Collective about their experiences CLEVER Cities at the [Final Conference, which took place in 2023](#).



Sustaining the legacy

A practical reality of regeneration programmes is the need to work within set parameters and processes (e.g. resourcing, planning and governance processes). This is even more acute in co-produced programmes, particularly in terms of budget limitations. Despite appetite for such work, funding is often timebound and project-specific and may be focused primarily on delivery rather than learning what works in the long term.

This is compounded by the challenges of specific funding cycles and timeframes, including those linked to political cycles and agendas, and the need to demonstrate impact often before the full value of any project is realised. This can limit capacity to embed learning and social impact from initial work, even though the new skills and mindsets of local participants could inspire better ways of working between institutions and communities in the future.

One of the ways to counter this is to consider how to maximise opportunities for social value, learning and sustainability within the initial project, evaluating impact in terms of learning 'what works' and feeding it back iteratively into future work.





What happened in Thamesmead

Throughout the STGE programme, the project team had permission and funding to try new things, and reflective space to understand what worked and what to do next in the long-term. This was hugely advantageous. It meant the project team could structure the programme to include major interventions as well as smaller 'test bed' projects, and plan for the end of the programme, considering key learning and longer-term initiatives.

In the STGE project, maximising social value was a key factor in the making and construction phase. The CDC selected the contractor based on their social value submission and discussed monitoring of the contractor's social value commitments. With hindsight, involving the community more actively in conversations during the contract negotiations (between the tender award and formalising the contract) would have been beneficial, helping to ensure true impact locally.

Determining how the STGE spaces were going to be maintained was a key priority for the CDC, with conversations on this emerging earlier than RIBA Stages 6-7 (Handover and Use). A member of the CDC recalls their feelings on this, expressed throughout this co-produced process: 'we're not moving on anything as a CDC unless we have a maintenance plan to say that all these features, we're putting in will be looked after in five years' time, in 10 years' time' (CDC Member).

This encouraged Peabody to think differently about the future, how spaces would be cared for and maintained for years to come. Throughout the programme, the CDC expressed an appetite to care and repair, 'working with things that are already there and improving them rather than trying to implement something new' (CDC Member).

Another topic of focus was what would practically enable and encourage a range of residents to use the spaces, noting a need for resident curiosity, early adopters and a programme of 'activation' (ideally including community-led initiatives that would support an ongoing transfer of power and stewardship). It was noted by project team members and the CDC that, in time, the original landscape design intent might become lost as the community truly took ownership of the space – and this would be seen as a successful outcome if the community felt duly empowered to use the space as their own.

The ultimate and most important outcomes of the programme might not be the social and environmental benefits from the physical spaces, but the co-production process by which they were created. This process can inspire and sustain new ways of working with residents, building trust and relationships, and continuing to transfer power. Again, this was not an outcome that could be assumed, but one that would take ongoing commitment from Peabody to continue legacy conversations with the CDC.

Recommendations



See co-production as a long-term investment in your local place and community capacity, and act accordingly.

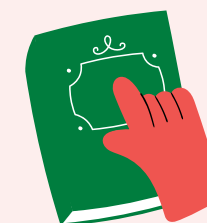
See co-production as not just about the design of a set space, but about innovation in governance processes, community infrastructure and capacity inside and outside your organisation.

This is critical to ensuring investment and process decisions focus on legacy and sustainability.

Work closely with residents to shape social value commitments by contractors, and to ensure these are locally relevant and will most benefit the community.

Creating a space between tender scoring and contract signing can help, enabling a resident group to be involved in shaping the social value element of a project. Iterate this process based on what works and update internal policies to make this part of 'business as usual' within procurement processes.

Co-produce with residents a key set of post-occupancy measures that will ensure their priorities for long-term outcomes are realised.



Further resources

Learn more about defining social impact and involving community members in there The Young Foundation reports:

[Quest for the S in ESG](#)

[Thames Futures Social Impact Report](#)

Concluding remarks



Creating the conditions for greater co-production

This report explores how developers and wider built environment professionals can design successful co-production programmes, working with residents and local people to regenerate and revive places and spaces. Sharing lessons from the STGE, the report considers how all those involved can fully participate and collaborate.

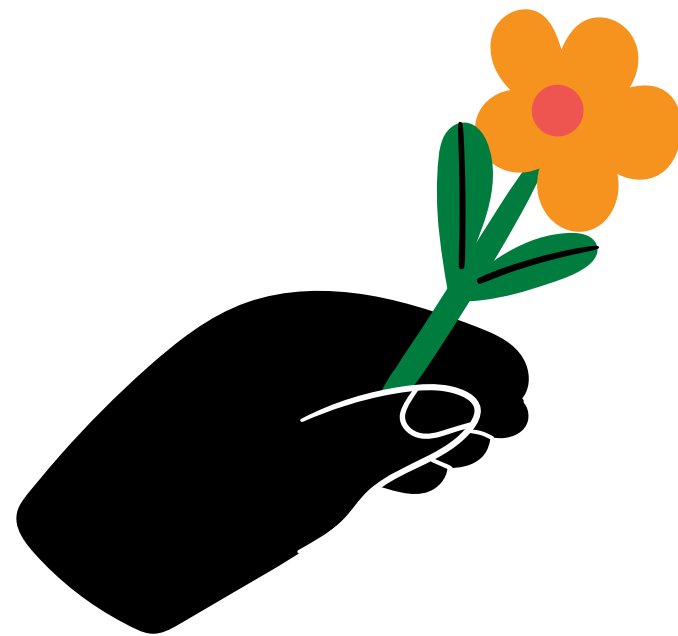
The positive social impact of co-produced regeneration projects is not just about what is physically created, but also less tangible benefits gained through the process of getting there, potentially nurturing new ways of working and greater collaboration between institutions, businesses and communities.

Placemaking, regeneration and housebuilding must work for the people it serves and there is an awareness of this coming to the fore in national and local agendas. As this gains momentum, an opportunity emerges for policymakers and funders to support built environment professionals to reimagine – even rebuild – traditional structures of decision-making and optimise the conditions for successful co-production.



Recommendations for policymakers and funders

This report posed the question, ‘**how can commissioners and developers ensure they are ready for participation with local communities?**’ These concluding remarks and the following recommendations explore what could be done to best support them to be ready, and to ensure lasting social value and sustainability.



Challenge assumptions of when communities want to (and can) be engaged in existing processes.

The [Engagement Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work](#) provides an excellent baseline for how and when to engage communities. But it may be possible to go further by weaving a golden thread of meaningful engagement opportunities and governance innovation through all RIBA stages and standard processes. This is particularly needed at:

RIBA Stage 0 – By involving communities from the initial stages of strategic definition to ensure that they can shape the vision for a place from day one.

RIBA Stage 5 – The role the CDC were able to play in the manufacturing and construction phase is unique and could be more readily adopted as a model.

RIBA Stage 7 – Spaces and places need to be activated to reach their potential and enabling this to be community-led continues to transfer power to residents.

Indeed, there would also be significant benefit where community engagement activities and associated insights are not just tied to specific developments, but instead form part of a more ongoing collaboration partnerships between communities and relevant institutions.

Build capacity to reflect and learn.

We have seen the importance of having permission to try things, and where the space to reflect and learn is crucial for all involved. In the set-up of future co-produced programmes, commissioners should consider opportunities to:

- Provide access to timely and trusted external expertise and ‘critical friend’ support at key moments of a programme, where it can add most value;
- Invest in the development of peer-to-peer, place-based learning programmes that build connections between those working on similar projects and challenges;
- Ensure continued support for people in communities to develop the capabilities needed for their evolving roles;
- Agree meaningful, place-specific metrics to monitor outcomes from participatory approaches over time; and
- Ensure learnings from co-production projects are evaluated and, where appropriate, integrated into organisational guidance and processes.

Explore and support a variety of funding models.

Funding can be a barrier to starting and continuing to co-produce, and the need for capital investment for practical work can leave little space for funding resident engagement. There is an opportunity to:

- Provide greater support to access and pool budgets.
- Develop guidance to make the most of social value commitments made by contractors, and involve residents to ensure these are locally relevant and will benefit the community; and
- Access small-scale ‘bridging funding’, supporting organisations beyond the lifespan of a project, and ensuring they do not lose relationships and infrastructure built in initial projects.



Further resources

For further recommendations on how policymakers and funders can ensure greener, fairer, community-powered growth, see:

[Rewriting the Rulebook](#)



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